



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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As a result of a sharp decline in the abundance of sablefish in southeastern Alaska, Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes has ordered a closed season on this species during the winter months, effective December 1 and extending until March 15.

The new regulation was imposed following a survey of the fishery which the Fish and Wildlife Service made this year at the request of sablefish and halibut fishermen of southeastern Alaska, who told officials of the Service at a meeting in Petersburg last March that the abundance of sablefish had declined to such an extent that the future of the fishery was endangered.

Investigations by Lawrence Kolloen, biologist of the Fish and Wildlife Service, supported the contentions of the fishermen, disclosing that the average catch made by each unit of gear fished has fallen from 140 pounds in 1934 to 57 pounds this year.

Another indication that the fishery has been removing an excessive quantity of sablefish is seen in the fact that the average weight of the fish caught has declined from 8 pounds in 1935 to 6-1/2 pounds in 1944.

In volume of production, as well as in returns to the fishermen, the sablefish fishery ranks fourth in Alaska, being exceeded only by the salmon, herring and halibut fisheries. Sablefish are taken also along the Pacific Coast of the United States, but only the Alaska fishery is affected by the regulation imposing the closed winter season.

Although not a member of the cod family, the sablefish is somewhat codlike in appearance and is widely known as the black cod. It is found on the same grounds as halibut and the two species often are taken together, although the sablefish ranges into even deeper water.

A winter closed season on sablefish, officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service pointed out, will not only protect this species during its spawning season and make it immune to capture for approximately one-third of the year, but will also have a beneficial effect on the halibut fishery. Since the legal season for halibut closes November 30, or earlier if the authorized quota has been caught, halibut taken incidentally in the sablefish fishery after the season closes cannot be retained. Because of the great depths from which the hooked fish are brought rapidly to the surface, it is believed that few of those returned to the water survive. Destruction of halibut by this means may have run to several thousands of fish per trip in recent years, it is believed.

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